

Community Preservation Act Committee Proposal Request Form for FY 2014

CPA funding category

Check all that apply

- ☐ Community Housing
- ☐ Open Space
- ☐ Historic Preservation
- ☐ Recreation

Date: December 4, 2012

Submitting Entity: Town of Amherst

Contact Person: David Ziomek, Director of Conservation and Development

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Overview of Proposal:

This proposal includes a funding request to help make improvements to the North Common to provide the community with a more flexible, programmable space that continues to respect the historic integrity of a landscape that is central to the civic and social activity of Amherst's downtown. The proposal requests funds to hire a professional consultant(s) to complete a revitalized design of the North Common as well as funds to implement the design.

Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria:

1. Description of funding needed including:

a. Documentation of cost estimates

Based on a detailed analysis completed by the engineering staff at DPW, the estimated cost of the project is \$530,000. The Town plans to resubmit a Parkland Acquisition and Renovation for Communities (PARC) grant in July, 2013 to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services (DCS) in hopes of covering 70% of the overall project costs. The grant application will be a two-year, design-build project with significant public input expected during the first phase. If the project receives support from Town Meeting and is funded by DCS, the design must be completed by June 30, 2014. With an approved design Amherst would then have until June 30, 2015 to complete the work.

b. Other sources of funding, e.g., grants, self-funding, fund-raising

Seventy percent (70%) of the total project cost would be reimbursed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services as part of a FY2014 PARC grant.

c. Timeline on how CPA funds, if awarded, would be spent

CPA funds would be spent over two fiscal years, with a specific amount of for design the first year and the remaining balance for construction during the second year.

Phase I Design: January 1, 2014 - June 30, 2014

Phase II Construction: July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015

d. Timeline for spending funds; expectation for spending over multiple years

If awarded, the PARC grant has strict requirements for timely expenditures within each fiscal year.

Phase I Design: \$50,000—must be spent by June 30, 2014

Phase II Construction: \$480,000—must be spent by June 30, 2015

2. Urgency of the Project, if any

The North Common has been in serious decline for more than 30 years. Erosion, compaction and overuse have created a situation that is unsafe for pedestrians and not ADA accessible. The trees are severely impacted and many are in poor health. As the central gathering place for literally dozens of events each year both formal and informal, it is critical to address this situation now.

3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to Project completion

The project will take two years to complete, corresponding with the PARC grant program that requires design during the first year and construction during the second year. Phase I Design will be completed by June 30, 2014 and construction will be completed by June 30, 2015.

4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources

During its review of the Town's FY2013 PARC grant application, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) indicated that the North Common is a contributing landscape in the Town's Central Business National Historic Register District, and as such, they would need to be included the revitalization of the North Common.

The Town Common is currently protected as a public park and from change of use by Massachusetts General Law (MGL). As part of the PARC grant requirement, the North Common will be additionally protected as open space under Article 97 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, dedicated to historic preservation and recreation use. CPA funds will also result in a Historic Preservation Restriction on the North Common to ensure its preservation and continuation as a civic space with historic significance.

5. Population(s) to be served by the Project

The North Common is a resource for residents and visitors alike and will provide a public, open space for generations to come.

6. How the Project is prioritized by requesting Town committees or commissions

For the Town's FY2013 PARC grant application, the Historical Commission voted to support the project so long as they have an active role in the design phase. The LSSE Commission also supported the project.

*****For the FY2014 PARC grant application, Town staff will work directly with the Historical Commission and Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Commission to conduct a public outreach process during the winter/spring 2013 to gather community input on the N. Common. Citizens, business and property owners as well as representatives from the BID and Chamber of Commerce will be invited to participate.***

7. Other information regarding the Project deemed necessary for CPAC

Description and History of North Common

Amherst has three Town Commons located within the more densely settled areas of the Town Center, East Village, and South Amherst Village Center that were formally recognized and dedicated as commons in 1788 from land in the old highways. The Town Center Common in the downtown is comprised of nearly 3.5 acres of open green space separated into three distinct sections: the South (managed by Amherst College), the Main (the largest section used most frequently for programming and large events) and the North Common. The North Common, which retains the more urban park-like setting with paved pathways, shade trees, benches, sculptural planters, WTCU Fountain, and sitting walls/tree planting boxes, is the focus of this funding request. The North Common is also in closer proximity to the downtown cafés, restaurants and shops, experiencing heavy use from pedestrians and passer byes, picnicking, tourism and sightseeing, special events, and limited passive recreation.

The commercial activity, variety of nearby housing options and extensive public transit service has helped the Town Common thrive. Because of the University and colleges, Amherst is a regional center for employment, services, and educational resources. In addition to the traditional level of visitation generated by the academic institutions and seasonal leaf-peeper 'tourism', Amherst is also becoming an increasingly important destination for cultural and historical tourism. The Town Center Common is a contributing landscape in the Central Business National Historic Register District, and although it has undergone various changes, its character and function has remained consistent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Attractions such as the Emily Dickinson Museum; the Museum of Natural History and Meade Art Museum at Amherst College; the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art; and the National Yiddish Book Center, have become increasingly popular destinations for people of all ages—with many of these visitors drawn to the Common for its character and social and civic activity.

As Amherst Center has grown and expanded, the Town Common has been the dominant landscape feature, evolving from a swampy hayfield in the early 19th century to an open green lawn on the Main Common and an urban park on the North Common that includes a parking lot, paved walkways, formal seating and shade trees. The parking lot was a mid 20th century addition to accommodate the increased traffic and visitation in the downtown.

Plans for Improvement

The purpose of improving the North Common is to provide the community with a more flexible, programmable space that continues to respect the historic integrity of a landscape that is central to the civic and social activity of Amherst's downtown.

Change is nothing new to the Common, in fact, it has been altered throughout its history to adapt to community needs, cultural trends and civic pride. The Amherst Ornamental Tree Association, formed in 1867, sought to improve the town's public spaces including major changes to the utilitarian Common, which had been used for military exercises, raising hay and grazing, and it contained a pond. The Association believed the Common should be a landscape of distinction, such that they drained and filled the pond, added pedestrian pathways, seating, water fountains and gas-fueled lights, and edged it with decorative fencing and shade trees. The domesticated look of the Common that remains to this day can be attributed to the work of the Ornamental Tree Association. Their improvements made it possible for the Common to serve as a site for community activities, including fairs, rallies, and a farmer's market, and has become one of the

town's most beloved green spaces. During the "City Beautiful" movement the Common continued to change as the Town hired renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to create a design for improving the central common. His plan, while never fully implemented, proposed a revised pattern of roadways, tree plantings, new pedestrian paths, and a formal "music stand" (bandstand).

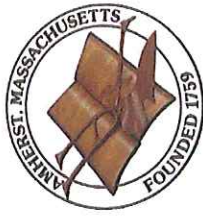
The Amherst Preservation Plan (2005) emphasized that physical improvements to the Common should be a major short-term goal of the Historical Commission and community, to help fulfill past designs and meets the needs of the community. Recent improvements to the Main Common include burying utility lines, increased accessibility with new 14' wide sidewalks that also provide more opportunities for vendors and programming, additional seating and historic lights. These efforts were fully supported by the community and were the first steps to adapt the Town Center Common to the 21st century and to achieve goals of the Master Plan and Economic Development plan that call for:

- ~ Increasing vibrancy of the downtown with improved amenities, higher density mixed use housing, expanded services and more commercial activity,
- ~ Encouraging community events and activities that draw people to the downtown, and
- ~ Preserving and enhancing Amherst's historic, cultural, and recreational resources

Improvements to the North Common are the next step in this process to meet the community's need for more flexible space in the Town Center that can accommodate small events, seasonal celebrations, and the increased daily activity of the downtown. The Town is applying for a two year design/build PARC grant to hire a professional designer that will prepare appropriate plans. The first year of design will allow for extensive public outreach, involvement of the Historical Commission, LSSE Commission and other boards/committees, and it will help galvanize support the business community, including the newly formed Business Improvement District (BID). The BID would like to increase the visibility and community connections of its members with additional programming on the Town Common and through partnerships to beautify the downtown. Preliminary discussions with the BID indicate that they are willing to support the project either through a one-time donation, by supplying additional amenities and/or providing assistance with annual maintenance. The Town continues to work with the Chamber of Commerce, the Amherst Rotary Club and other organizations to develop partnerships that would contribute to the improvements of the North Common.

The conceptual designs included in this proposal show the North Common as an accessible space with wide generous sidewalks, plazas for special events (bicycle week, lighting of the holiday maple) and as informal gathering space with moveable tables and chairs, substantial bench seating to encourage more picnicking and socializing for visitors, students and business patrons, and an interpretive plaza around the WTCU fountain. These designs provide significantly more space and amenities to utilize the common as an integral outdoor space in the downtown. To ensure that the common will withstand additional foot traffic and use, plans will need to address site drainage, root compaction, durable turf, planting of up to 10 new shade trees in anticipation of future need, and interpretive plaques that show the public the evolution of the common.

North Common



- Property Map
- Aerial Property Lines
 - Basemap
 - Streets
 - Local Roads
 - Major Roads
 - State Routes
 - MFD Roads
 - Multi-lane Access Highway
 - Multi-lane Highway, Right of Way
 - Other Numbered Collector
 - Major Road, Collector
 - Minor Road, Arterial

Horizontal Datum: MA Stateplane Coordinate System, Zone 4151 Datum NAD83, Feet
Vertical Datum: NAVD83, Feet

Planimetric & topographic basemap features compiled at 1"=40' scale from April, 2009 Aerial Photography. Parcels compiled to match the basemap; revisions are ongoing.

The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or property conveyance purposes. Utility structures and underground utility locations are approximate and require field verification.

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1" = 50 ft

Amherst GIS Viewer

July 10, 2012



Town Common PARC improvements



- Property Map
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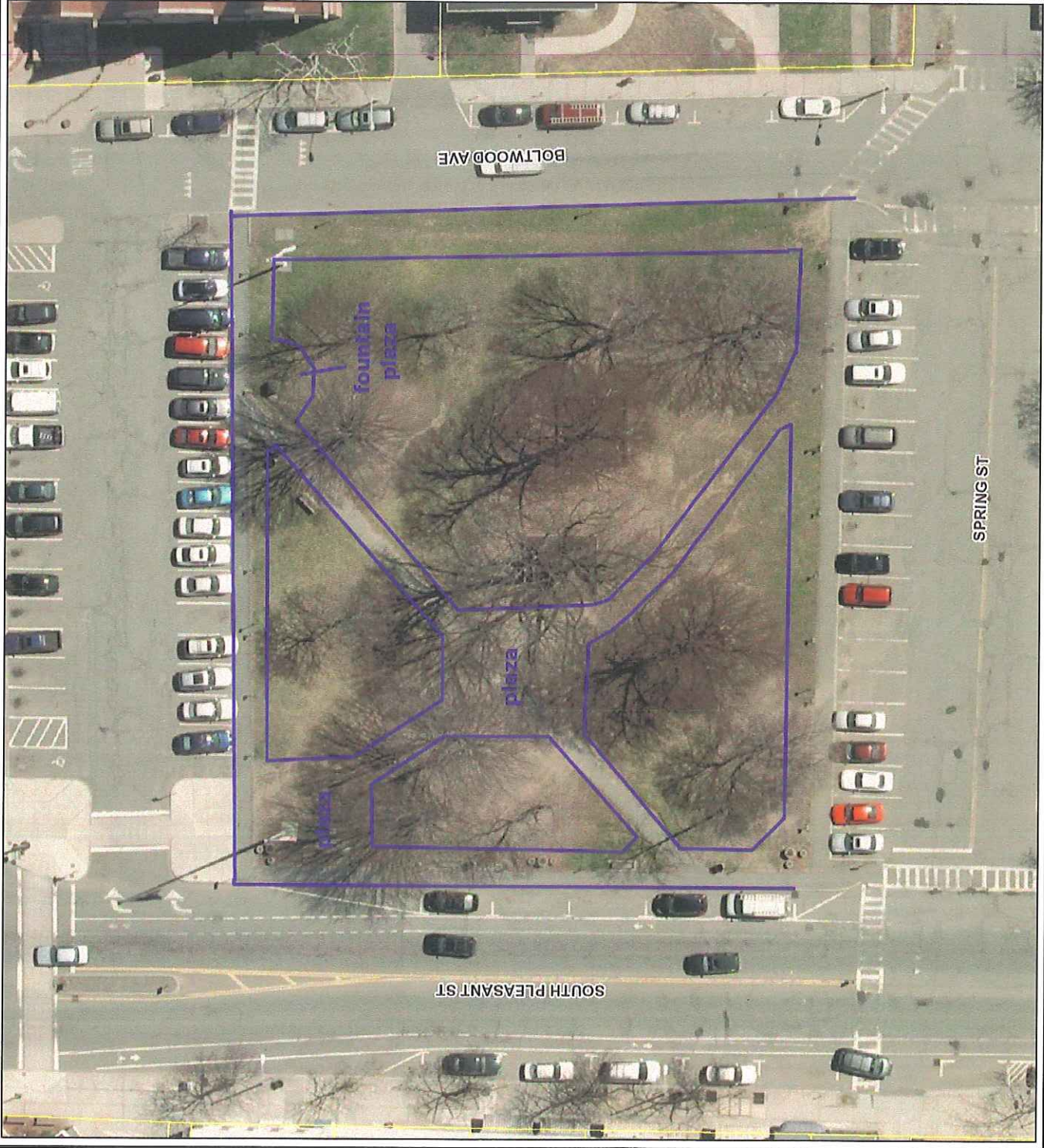
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1" = 40 ft

Amherst GIS Viewer

July 2, 2012



FY2013 PARC Grant Application—North Common Existing Conditions

